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DAILY COVID TEST CAPACITY TO REACH 20L BY MONTH-END

Thursday's announcement came after a home-based rapid antigen testing (RAT) kit by a Pune firm was given the nod

HOME TEST KITS TO BE AVAILABLE IN 3-4 DAYS

Stating that the kits would be on the market in 3-4 days, ICMR director general Balram Bhargava said three more firms would soon get the approval. India has reached 16-20 lakh daily test capacity as on Thursday. It would be ramped up to 20 lakh by the month-end and scaled up to 45 lakh by July. A record 20.55 lakh tests were conducted in the past 24 hours

RESULTS DELIVERED TO YOUR PHONE

- For home testing, one must buy a kit from a chemist's, download a mobile app, register and conduct the test as per the manual
- After the test, click a photo of the report, upload it to the app and get the result on your phone. This will ensure confidentiality
- The results will be stored on a server linked with ICMR database

105

KIT COMPANIES VALIDATED BY THE ICMR SO FAR, 41 APPROVED

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

NEW UNIT TO MAKE 20-CR VAX DOSES

New Delhi: Bharat Biotech on Thursday announced its plan to rope in its wholly-owned subsidiary Chiron Behring to ramp up production of Covaxin by an additional 20 crore doses per year. This will effectively take the volume of Covaxin to nearly 1 billion doses per annum. As of now, Bharat Biotech manufactures 1.5 crore doses per month, which is likely to go up to 4-5 crore doses per month by July. It said that Covaxin produced at Chiron Behring's Gujarat facility could be available by September

Doctors performing a diagnostic nasal endoscopy on a patient to detect black fungus at a hospital in Hyderabad on Thursday | PTI

Amid spurt in black fungus cases, crucial drug out of stock

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

THERE has been an "exponential" increase in cases of Covid-Associated Mucormycosis (CAM), or black fungus, in Bengaluru over the last 10 days, but the all-important anti-fungal drug Liposomal Amphotericin or Amphotericin-B has surprisingly gone out of stock!

In its absence, some hospitals are either using other alternative drugs, which may not be as effective as Amphotericin-B or are using plain Amphotericin, which is nephro-toxic and has the potential to damage kidneys.

Some private hospitals, which have operated upon CAM patients are frantically looking for Amphotericin-B and even calling government and government hospitals for some vials. "Amphotericin-B was easily available in the market till recently. It is not available now," said Medical Director of Sri Bhagwan Mahaveer Jain Hospital, MD Marker. "There is an increase in CAM cases and we urgently require Amphotericin-B," he added.

"Liposomal Amphotericin enables us to use higher doses without the toxicity associated with plain Amphotericin. Higher doses ensure better and quicker eradication of the fungus. Unfortunately, the supply of Amphotericin-B is inadequate, given the current demand. The only option left is to improve immunity with better control of diabetes and removal of dead tissue from the nose and sinuses to lower the fungal load and use second line drugs like Posaconazole or Isavuconazole. This has to be done at the earliest to prevent the spread to the eyes, resulting in loss of vision, and spread to the brain, which can result in loss of life," said Dr E V Raman, consultant ENT specialist, Manipal Hospital, Old Airport Road.

Dr Athira Ramakrishnan, consultant ENT specialist, Fortis Hospital, Bannerghatta Road, also admitted that there was a "shortage of Amphotericin-B due to the sudden surge in the number of cases." CONTINUED ON: P4

KARNATAKA	MAY 19	MAY 20
Fresh cases	34,281	28,869
Recoveries	49,953	52,257
Deaths	468	548

SOS FOR DRUG BUT VOLUME LOW; NEED TO SCALE UP IMPORT

The Centre asks states to notify mucormycosis or black fungus under the Epidemic Act

Black fungus has already killed 90 in Maharashtra, where 1,500 such cases have been detected; 850 are under treatment in hospitals

Maharashtra tells PM it needs 1.50-2 lakh vials of Amphotericin B to treat the fungus, but has received only 16,000 from the Centre so far

Six Indian firms are manufacturing Amphotericin B. Five more companies have approval to produce it

Some companies have so far placed orders to import 5-6 lakh vials of the shot

"You have to get the medicine from wherever in the world. You have to take steps right now," Delhi HC tells Centre

Borrowing trends

Break-up of loans across categories

	Mar 2020	Mar 2021	Growth 2021 (%)
CONSUMER DURABLES	₹9,299 Cr	₹7,307 Cr	-21.4%
HOUSING LOANS	₹13,37,899 Cr	₹14,59,066 Cr	9.1%
ADVANCE AGAINST FIXED DEPOSITS	₹79,494 Cr	₹71,544 Cr	-10.0%
ADVANCES TO INDIVIDUALS AGAINST SHARE & BONDS	₹5,354 Cr	₹4,578 Cr	-14.3%
CREDIT CARD OUTSTANDING	₹1,08,093 Cr	₹1,16,537 Cr	7.8%
EDUCATION LOANS	₹65,744 Cr	₹63,805 Cr	-3.0%
VEHICLE LOANS	₹2,20,610 Cr	₹2,41,657 Cr	9.5%
LOAN AGAINST GOLD JEWELLERY	₹33,303 Cr	₹60,464 Cr	81.6%
OTHER PERSONAL LOANS	₹6,93,800 Cr	₹7,88,564 Cr	13.6%
TOTAL	₹25,53,658 Cr	₹28,13,514 Cr	10.2%

Gold pledging on the rise as stress hits households

Reserve Bank data show people are increasingly turning to gold and personal loans to meet basic expenditure and medical emergencies

ANURADHA SHUKLA @ New Delhi

WITH businesses shut, jobs lost and salaries slashed, many people are emptying their household gold savings to borrow money to meet their essential expenditure as well as emerge medical requirements, show official data from the Reserve Bank of India.

According to the latest RBI data, loans against gold have jumped a whopping 82% since March 2020. At the same time, consumer durables and education loans are down by 21.4% and 3%, respectively, showing how people affected by the economic stress induced by the coronavirus pandemic are prioritising their spending.

The outstanding loans against gold went up from ₹33,303 crore in March 2020 to ₹60,464 crore in March this year, pushing the overall personal loan portfolio of financial institutions up by 10.02%.

One of the main reasons for the spike in gold loan is the increase in emergency spending due to the second Covid wave, loss of income, and reluctance of banks to give insecure personal loans, forcing people to use their household gold to get money.

According to bankers, the trend is likely to continue. "The surge in gold loans is likely to go up further. While demand for gold loan was already high even last year, we saw fresh demand from April onwards. One out of every three loan queries is about gold loan. In fact, low income and lack of collateral have directed many people to opt for that," said a senior official with State Bank of India.

Getting personal loans has also become tough with banks becoming more cautious about unsecured loans. So, people who have lost job and still have monthly instalment to pay, are using gold jewellery as the last resort to get further loan.

"The rejection rate is going high for personal loan criteria. We have been asked to go for additional KYCs including salary slips, and asking for collaterals including stocks and other assets. The management is very careful, considering the fear of high NPA," an executive with ICICI Bank said.

The central bank had already warned that the direct fallout of the Covid will be on public spending. Data from the RBI reveals that loan for consumer durables was down 21.4% as loan outstanding was ₹7,307 crore in March 2021 against ₹9,299 crore in March 2020. Education loan outstanding was also down by ₹65,744 crore to ₹63,805 crore.

₹2 lakh interim relief for families of Chamarajanagar O_2 tragedy: Govt

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE State Government on Thursday informed the Karnataka High Court that it has decided to give Rs 2 lakh as interim compensation to each of the families of the 24 victims who died due to shortage of oxygen at the Chamarajanagar District Hospital earlier this month.

Recording the submission made by Advocate General Prabhuling K Navadagi, a special division bench of Chief Justice Abhay Shreeniwas Oka and Justice Aravind Kumar directed the government to make the payments immediately to the families. On the directions of the high court, a committee headed by former high court judge, Justice A N Venugopala Gowda, constituted by the Karnataka State Legal Services Authority, had submitted a report confirming the deaths due to shortage of oxygen. Attributing the tragedy to the callousness of the district administration and district health authorities, the committee had also recommended compensation to the families of the victims.

Taking note of the committee recommendations, the court had directed the government to make its stand known on payment of compensation. Accordingly, the Advocate General conveyed the decision of the government to the court.

The court orally observed that whatever compensation the government has planned to pay, should be made immediately and added that for now, they will not go into whether it is adequate. Also, the court said that at a later stage, it will look into the issue of more death of patients, when the counsel for the petitioners submitted that the actual number of death of patients is more than 24. To this, the Advocate General pointed out that the actual number of deaths were 24 as per the committee report.

HC slams U'khand govt for massing at Char Dham

VINEET UPADHYAY @ Dehradun

THE Uttarakhand High Court on Thursday hauled the state government over the coals after perusing videos of priests massing at the Char Dhaam sites without following Covid protocol. Citing the aftereffects of the Maha Kumbh, a bench comprising Chief Justice RS Chauhan and Justice A K Verma asked why there was no crowd control mechanism in place and wondered why the administration had not learnt from its mistakes.

"First we make the mistake of Kumbh Mela, then there is Char Dham. Why do we repeatedly cause embarrassment to ourselves?" the Chief Justice asked. "In Kedarnath & Badrinath temples, I have seen videos that social distancing is not being followed by the priests. Even if deity is being worshipped, you can't let 23 priests enter the temple. Who is the person appointed by the state to monitor this?" the court questioned. When state tourism secretary Dilip Jawalkar told the bench that they had issued guidelines for rituals, the court said videos of crowded sancta sanctorum suggested that none was following them.

While the yatra remains suspended this year, rituals at the shrines have been allowed. However, pilgrims are barred.

Daily death audit in villages to curb mortality

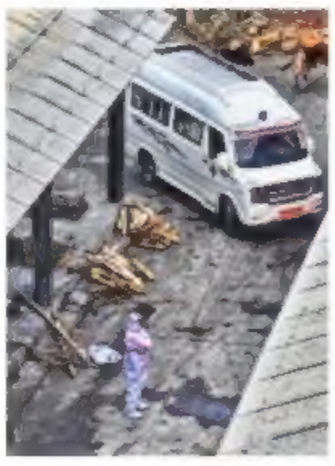
CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

WITH the huge increase in the number of deaths related to Covid-19 in smaller towns and villages, the State Government has decided to conduct a death audit on a daily basis in each district with the help of an expert committee. The decision was taken at a recent meeting of the Chief Minister with district Deputy Commissioners and members of the Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19.

"Auditing the deaths on a daily basis will help in understanding why they occurred and the report will be used to fill the gaps and prevent future deaths of Covid 19. The report will also be submitted to the state," an order from the Chief Secretary to the DCs said.

Meanwhile, experts from TAC say that there has been a delay in patients reporting to hospitals, which seems to be the main reason for the increase in the number of deaths and also the surge as it is being seen that patients are not getting tested and isolating themselves on the onset of symptoms.

"We have noticed that there has been a delay in reporting to hospitals. Also, it is important to understand if a patient's death was also due to nonavailability of ICU care, oxygen beds, etc. This is important for the state to prepare for the third wave," said Dr C N Manjunath, Director, Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Research and member of the TAC. P7



A family member waits to perform the last rites of a Covid victim at the Chamarajpet crematorium in Bengaluru on Thursday | SHRIRAM BN

ACROSS THE STATE

5,34,954 TOTAL ACTIVES CASES

1,15,08,005	1,20,711
TOTAL VACCINATIONS	SAMPLES TESTED ON THURSDAY

- The vaccination drive for the 18-44 age category, which was suspended earlier, will restart for priority groups on Saturday
- With 548 deaths on Thursday, the mortality rate in the state saw a marginal increase from 1.01 per cent to 1.02 per cent
- Davanagere and Kolar districts will be under total lockdown for three days till May 24
- A Mega Oxygen Generator with a capacity to produce 500 LPM has started production on a trial basis in Yadgir on Wednesday

Mamata rages over PM's meeting, BJP gives it back

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kolkata/New Delhi

LAUNCHING a blistering attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for first time since she came to power for the straight third term, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee described his online meeting with district magistrates (DMs) on the Covid situation on Thursday as a 'super flop' event that 'humiliated' the participant CMs as none of them was allowed to speak.

The BJP swiftly gave it back, saying her behaviour was not appropriate and against team spirit. Mamata allegedly interrupted when the turn of 24 Parganas DM came during the event. The district has been reporting a high Covid caseload.

"The kind of behaviour shown by her wasn't desirable," Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said. The sharp rift surfaced at a time when the CBI has arrested three TMC MLAs, including two ministers.

"None of the CMs was allowed to speak for a second. Armed with documents, we were prepared to place our demands. All the CMs were sitting like puppet. We are not bonded labourers. We, the CMs, felt humiliated and insulted. It was a casual and super flop meeting," Mamata raged.

UNITED FIGHT

With self regulation, Katur-Ichanagi villages have stayed Covid-free

K SHIVA KUMAR @ Mysuru

At a time when the test positivity rate is hovering over 55 per cent and the death count rising in the rural parts of Mysuru district, two neighbouring villages in Haradanahalli Panchayat limits of Nanjangud taluk have shown the way in the fight against the pandemic. Having steadfastly followed Covid-appropriate behaviour and other regulations imposed by the village heads, Katur and Uchagani, with a total population of about 2,000, have not reported a single case of Covid-19 both during the first and second waves.

HOPE FLOATS

Happy that not a single case was reported during the first wave that started in March last year, the villagers had planned a grand festival of Goddess Maramma (Mari habba) by sacrificing sheep to the deity for protecting them from the virus. But, with the second wave sweeping through the rural areas too, they postponed the ritual and are now focusing on protecting the children from a possible third wave.

Village panchayat member Shivamma explained that she has made it a point to ensure a hygienic atmosphere, good sanitation and compulsory fumigation three days in a week. CONTINUED ON: P7

A farmer tills his land wearing a mask at Kaatur village in Mysuru district | EXPRESS

NATIONWIDE	MAY 19	MAY 20
Fresh cases	2,67,334	2,76,110
Recoveries	3,89,851	3,69,077
Deaths	4,529	3,874

JAB-O-METER

TAKE YOUR SHOT

May 19: 11,45,569 doses

May 20: 14,56,088 doses

TOTAL DOSES: 19,18,10,604

EXPRESS READ

Stricter curbs on the cards, say ministers

Bengaluru: With rural areas in Karnataka still witnessing a surge in Covid cases and many districts under a complete lockdown, Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai and Revenue Minister R Ashoka said that in the coming days, the restrictions will be enforced more strictly and the government is planning stringent measures. P5

Doc among 2 women held for illegal vaccination

Bengaluru: Two women, including a doctor, were arrested on Thursday for allegedly running an illegal vaccination racket at ITI Layout in the city. P7

WITH THIS ISSUE

CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE INDULGE — 30 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)